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ABSTRACT

Oral interviews with female teachers are used as the basis for an analysis of the personal, cultural, and social lives of women who taught in a small midwestern city during the 1930s. Portions of interviews with teachers are presented, and ethnographic theory and techniques used in the interviews are discussed. Analyses of the interviews focus on social and professional restrictions imposed on female teachers before World War II. Female teachers' memories of their childhood views of teachers are brought out, as are their opinions on the teacher's status in the community. Responses to questions regarding the role of women in the 1930s, reasons for choosing teaching as a career, and the hidden marriages of teachers who were forbidden to marry while teaching are discussed. Similarities among the viewpoints of a majority of the teachers are contrasted to those of one teacher whose cultural differences made her an outsider. In the conclusion, the value of an investigation into teacher roles and images is reviewed. (FG)

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Teachers as Women: An Ethnohistory of the 1930s

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association
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TEACHERS AS WOMEN: AN ETHNOHISTORY OF THE 1930s

Part I: Linda's Story

No more than 10 years had passed since Linda A. and her friends had walked to elementary school together. They would laugh and talk and skip their way to school staying on the west side of the street and keeping an eye out for Miss K., their second grade teacher. Miss K. usually walked the mile from her home to Taylor School on the east side of Pleasant Avenue, but the children knew that
(1) occasionally she would start out on the west side. When she did, Linda and her friends crossed the street to the other side. That way they wouldn't have to speak to her. "We just admired her so," Linda said, "we were afraid we'd say something we shouldn't" (01--11).[1]

(2) In 1928, Linda became a teacher. Her childhood wish had been fulfilled. A few weeks before, she had stopped by her new school, Pierce Elementary, and picked up the fifth grade textbooks she would be using studying them to stay "a hop, skip and a jump" ahead of her better students (01—33). She had never been too scientific and most of what she did know was "just book learning" (01--33), but fifth grade science required she actually perform experiments. She felt a little nervous and awfully excited. As Linda says, "Oh, I was thrilled to death. At the top of the world" (01--44).

(3)(4) Linda knew the supervising principal for Pierce School. Always an excellent student, Linda had gone to elementary school, high school and college with two of his daughters and he had provided her a sterling recommendation for the building principal, Miss J. Linda had been hired after talking to Miss J. on the phone. Miss J. and Linda had never met in person.

Now on this first morning Linda walked into Pierce School. Miss J. said,

(5) Linda A.: "Are you new?" and I said, "Yes, ma'am. Fifth grade." "Oh," she said, You'll have a new teacher." I started to say "I," and she said, "HUSH!" to me, you know. She said, "You go sit here," and she took me into that

little office and she said, "You sit here and I'll talk to you later." She went back and forth to her room, back and forth and she called the supervisor and said the new teacher isn't here yet. I even raised my hand. She just shook her head and walked out. 9:15, she called again and said, "What am I gonna do? That new teacher isn't here yet. You said she was so reliable! You were so thrilled! She was gonna . . ." and all this rigmarole. Finally I said, "I am Miss A." She said, "Why didn't you tell me in the first place?" I didn't have the heart to. She was much older. I didn't have the heart to tell her, you know, that she wouldn't let me talk (01--44-45).

And so Linda A. started her "real" training as a teacher. She had had two years of teacher training at a nearby university. Her training even included six months of student teaching at a laboratory school. But Miss J.'s expecta-
(6) tions were different from her fellow teachers.

Linda A.: Of course, I was full of all these new ideas, you know. And most of them [the older teachers] hadn't even gone back to any extension courses, let alone summer school and there I was out of college with all my bright ideas, you know. They didn't go over so well with these older people. . . . Oh, I remember one day she [Miss J.] came in and took my little boxes of stars away from me and said we shouldn't, I shouldn't pay the children for doing their good work, and, uh, I wanted to go outside for an art class, and she just refused to let me go. And, of course, up there [the university] they took classes out (01--45).

Not only was Miss J. different from Linda's professors, but Pierce Elementary School was quite apart from the University Laboratory School.

(6) Linda A.: My first year I had 57 [students] and I asked the principal at recess when the other teacher was coming. . . . 57. We didn't have enough desks. We used orange crates. . . . we put books on window sills, and never thought anything about it. That was it. I came in from . . . student teaching; there were 13 in a class. I couldn't believe I was going to have them.

Interviewer: How did you handle 57 kids?

Linda A.: I don't know (01--19-20).

But it did not really take Linda long to adjust, and by the mid-thirties many of the older teachers at Pierce had been replaced with young, single women. Linda grew to her position.

(7) Linda A.: Oh, I just loved teaching. Even when I was little in grade school, all I always said I was going to be was a teacher. I think that they could do anything to me, and I would have still loved it. . . . I was one of a large family and I was second in line and took care of them as though I was mothering them. I always wanted a large family. I didn't have it. I don't know, I just thought they were all my children, every year.

• • •

(7) And we all felt like, I think the children thought you were their other mother too.

• • •

(7) I always stayed at school, usually, and talked and graded papers and, till about 5:30 or 6:00 the janitor would run us off. He was a doll. He always said "Darling" to us and he put a shower in the basement for these little ones that didn't come very clean if they were going on a trip, and our mothers always wondered where the old towels and washcloths and soap went, then after they used them the lady across the street would wash them for us and bring them back and once in a while a child would take a towel home or a washcloth or a bar o' soap, but we didn't care. They wanted something at home, too, you know, you can understand it (01--10).

• • •

(7) We were all like a little knit family and we did everything together. We'd go to shows together, go out to eat together and when somebody had a birthday we celebrated (01--14).

• • •

(8) Interviewer: Did any of you room together?

Linda A.: No, we all lived at home. [That is, their parents' home.]

Interviewer: You were all from here, then?

Linda A.: We were all from Lindenwald. . . . One girl lived uptown on Vanderveer [Street].

• • •

(9) Interviewer: Was there anytime where you felt the depression was impacting on what was going on in your school?

Linda A.: No, not really.

Interviewer: Not even salary-wise?

(10) Linda A.: No. We had a meeting and one man said, one man teacher said, "See the handwriting on the wall," and all of us dumb little single girls, we looked back where he was pointing and there was no _____ (laughing), but one year we taught a month free. We did take a few cuts, but you know, things were so cheap then I don't think we realized . . . . Yes, we were all living at home
(8) and no one had a car. Well, the teacher that came from uptown, the East Side of Hamilton, she had a car, but her folks bought it for her and she was paying a little bit a month, you know, or I should say they loaned her the money with interest free and of course that all entranced us, but the rest of us didn't need a car; we just walked to school and I walked home when it was the lunch period (01--15-16).

• • •

Linda and her fellow teachers marched in the fire prevention parade every year and helped in the community drive to pass the school bond levy by making posters "and all the rigmarole that goes on." (1-33)

(11) Linda A.: That was just part of the job. You know, it just went with it and as I said I think at the University they stressed that you get in the community and you should live in the community where you teach and, uh, ... To know the people, to get in on their things, and go to church with them. Of course, we all had to teach Sunday School. As soon as you started teaching you had a class. . . . Well, I had mine when I was in college, in fact, I started teaching when I was in high school, but that was one thing they wanted you to get in with them and do things with them, and of course, Sunday School you had your same children, but it's a different way that they don't have to come, they don't have to learn anything, you know. And you [the students] go into the next class whether you're there half the time or not, but it is different than school. But you do learn a lot about 'em in a different way.

• • •

Interviewer: Did any of you, or any of the teachers that you know, feel that you were inhibited, that you weren't able to do what you wanted to do?

Linda A.: I don't think so. I just think we thought what was expected of us.

Interviewer: You were comfortable with that, that role?

Linda A.: Oh, yea (01--11).

• • •

(12) And then after the six weeks of summer school then you take a trip. I saved pennies, nickels and dimes all year long and I had enough for a two or three weeks vacation in the summertime. And then three or four teachers would get together and go someplace. . . . One year we borrowed one of the teacher's brother's car. We had to give him 200 dollars and pay the insurance on the car. That was before we started. We had to have it serviced, but that wasn't very much, 200 dollars, and there was five of us, so that wasn't too bad. . . . We went to Canada . . . and had a time. We didn't have a time getting through [customs] because . . . he [the customs agent] said we were all teachers. Well there were five of us, three teachers and two secretaries, and this one girl said she was a striptease artist from the Gaiety. He let us through and didn't check a thing.

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(7) Linda A.: (Referring to her school faculty) We were all close. In fact, we practically lived together. We were at school so much we would have covered dish suppers for the five of us and take our lunches.

Interviewer: Were they all females?

Linda A.: Yes, oh yes.

Interviewer: All single?

Linda A.: You couldn't teach if you were married. Goodness sake, you lost everything when you got married.

Part II: Research Methods and Ethnohistory

Ethnohistory seeks the cultural definitions of historical participants. It searches for the conceptions used by the participants to organize their world and to define their situation.

Linda A. started teaching in the Hamilton, Ohio public schools in 1928. The above account was taken from a collection of personal histories we are gathering at Miami University. This project seeks information which will allow the development of a concrete image of the culture of education in a small Midwestern city in the years from about 1929 to World War II. It interweaves the historical and anthropological techniques which are the foundation of ethnohistory.

Ethnohistory adds a slightly different purpose to the examination of traditional historical evidence. It suggests a few new techniques for the gathering and analyses of written, oral and physical documents. Furthermore, objective facts and truths are secondary to the perceptions of the situation. The detailed and concrete representation of the cultural scene is the primary goal. Questions are not considered in a nomothetic framework. Instead one might ask questions like: How did the participants organize their world in common? What are the shared cultural definitions of the group? What conceptualizations were used as the basis for actions?

Such questions place the people being studied at the center of the action, not as objects but as subjects. In this example, we are not studying Linda A. She is not the object of the study. We are examining the cultural scene of which she was a part. Her position is as a subject through whom we view that scene. If we delineate in concrete terms the world as seen by various actors, we should be able to decipher those assumptions which the group shares.

We should also be able to discover the various ways these participants organized themselves.

The emphasis on placing people at the center as viewers instead of the viewed results in two tendencies found in ethnohistory. First, the people studied tend to be of lower status than those found in traditional history. The ethnohistorian generally concentrates on minority groups and non-Western cultures such as American Indians or primitive African tribes. Our project concentrates less on the traditional historical subjects in education--administrators, politicians, and school boards--and more on the often ignored groups--students, parents, and teachers. Teachers are perceived as low-status groups within the overall educational culture rather than as mere extensions of the organizational elites.

The second tendency is the reliance on the personal history and individual narrative as the basic form of information. Traditional historical techniques tend to assume an externally determined reality against which such personal evidence can be measured, hence the reliance on written documents as a criterion for truth. We must admit, however, that precollected group data, organized by those collecting the information, invite the imposition of cultural bias by those collecting or recording the evidence. Statistics gathered by local school systems provide us with a world-view organized by the educational elite. To avoid this predigested evidence, information must be sought directly from those individuals involved in the very action itself.

The rejection of an external, objective criterion for truth should not be equated with the abandonment of rigorous methodology. In fact, the reverse should occur. Since the very purpose is to find various realities separate from one assumed overriding truth, additional techniques of analysis are required to maintain a rigorous methodological foundation. The traditional historiographic

techniques of internal validity are maintained, while several techniques found in ethnography are added.

One ethnographic technique to gather oral evidence makes use of the "informant." Typical oral history relies on the formal taped interview. While ethnohistory may also use formal interviews, the addition of follow-up informal conversations is helpful. The concept of the informant implies a much closer relationship with the subject than the taped interview. In the formal interview propriety holds sway, trust is difficult to develop, and anonymity is impossible to promise. Furthermore, formal interviews tend to be one-session interviews. On the other hand, informants become more than people to interview. A relationship may develop which permits more trust and more personal involvement. Several informal meetings provides a more complete understanding of personal realities.

In addition, techniques such as those developed in the "new ethnology" (also called "ethnoscience" or "semantic ethnography") may be used. When culture is conceived of as "the knowledge people use to generate and interpret social behavior,"[2] the investigation of culture requires the study of people's knowledge. This can best be accomplished by studying the language people use. Language analysis built on "descending" or "ascending" "structural questions" is one such way to determine conceptual categories.[3]

Other more traditional ethnographic techniques may also be utilized during the interviews. The intentional misuse of words, phrases, or referents by the researcher delineates precise meanings and categories. The restatement and paraphrasing of ideas clarifies the participant's understanding of concepts. The response of the informant to hypothetical situations reinforces the meaning of cultural rules. These are very concrete methods which can be used by the historian to aid in clarifying cultural views in the past.

The single most important contribution of ethnography to historiography is the strong influence on the investigator to avoid the application of external structure to the participants' narratives until after the information gathering process. The approach emphasizes the need to concentrate on the subjective aspects of phenomena that were used by the participants to conceptualize their world. Intellectual interpretation must be the final step not the first. In the final analysis, ethnohistory is merely the description of a group's culture in time.

Part III: Analysis

Linda A's narrative gives us clues of the possible social constructions used by women who taught in the Hamilton Schools in the 1930s. She is but one teacher in one school and, of course, we must be careful not to draw conclusions unsubstantiated by others. The analysis that follows indicates that many conceptualizations were shared by those teachers interviewed. Please understand that this analysis is not conclusive at this time and all analyses in this paper must be considered tentative.

Women Teachers' View of Teachers

Linda A. provides us with a view of teachers built on conceptions in conflict. In anecdote 1 we see the view of the teacher as someone to respect and fear. Forged in childhood this view seems to present the teacher as a powerful force, someone whose very presence may make us misspeak, whom, out of respect, we should avoid even if it means crossing the street. As Barbara B. put it, "I stood in awe of my teachers" (13--15). Bertha C. believed that teachers were very dedicated when she was a student (9--21). This attitude became embedded in their own concept of a teacher. "You were the teacher," says Sallie D., "and you demanded a certain respect and it was given you . . . (19--29).

But in anecdote 5 Linda A. shows that she does not lose her respect for authority even when she becomes the teacher. Fearful of authority, she cannot tell the principal that she is the teacher, not a student. She even tried to raise her hand, an obvious gesture of subordination. Barbara B. was not only in awe of her teachers but "always stood in awe of everybody who was in control" (13--16). Teachers were expected to carry out orders, not initiate them. Susan E. puts it this way:

Susan E.: You were told what to do. You were told to get this, so much work done, and so much was laid--I mean--from the main office so much was laid out .. . . . You carried out what you were supposed to do. You didn't know any different (23—31).

Interviewer: Did you ever think that they didn't know what they were talking about?

Susan E.: I did later. But then I wasn't--I guess, I don't know. I--You never--You didn't used, much, to question authority.

Barbara B. is able to laugh, now, about the structured atmosphere and her fear of the supervisor.

Barbara B.: We did have very structured (pause) everything. The children had to be very quiet. You had to keep on your schedule. Outside of our door we had posted our schedule, and when the supervisor came, you had better be having what it said you were to have (laughs) even if you had to stop in the middle of a word, which is a little exaggeration, but he was very adamant about keeping on schedule . . . . I really was frightened of him. I was really fearful of him . . . . I guess I was afraid I would do something wrong, and that was just a no-no. Oh, one of the things that he was very strict about was shades. They must all be at the same level, which I thought was a little silly, but I was very careful to have them that way.

• • •

Interviewer: What if you disagreed with him about what was right?

Barbara B.: You didn't (13--1-2).

But teachers were not uncomfortable in this situation and can even talk about the freedom they had. Peggy F. explained, "But there was a lot of freedom in music and plays and games within your own classroom. Then later on, teachers were assigned to go on the playground; and you could organize your games, you know, "Farmer in the Dell" and . . ." (4--25).

So teachers are people to be both respected and respectful, feared and fearful. Creativity and individual initiative are frowned upon which perhaps explains one teacher's thankfulness for teachers' manuals. "They assume you don't know anything and take it from there" (19--13). Teachers were seen as leaders of children and followers of men.

In anecdote 7 Linda A. portrays the school with a family-like metaphor. Sallie D. has the same vision. "Everybody was sort of a close family" (19--19). Certainly close, even sister-like relationships, developed among many of the teachers. Peggy F. states, "I enjoyed the companionship of all the teachers there because we stayed together so long. Nobody would ever be asked to move" (4--16). While all the teachers seemed to get along well, there did seem to be a split between the older and younger teachers which mimicked the generation gap which often occurs between mothers and daughters. Susan E. remarked, "I was eighteen, and I was thrown with women who were older and had been teaching longer and I--Well, whatever you did, you were younger and you were 'on the pan' quite often, in other words. And what you were doing was nothing, I mean it wasn't . . . there used to be a time when you, as I say, you had to be so guarded in things that you did socially and all that sort of thing" (23--19). Roseanne G. remembers the dress that her principal gave to her. "She had a blue silk dress from the early 1900s that she probably had worn in somebody's wedding--I don't know why she had it. And when she looked at me she said, "I

think you could wear my dress!" (laughs) I didn't know what was coming next! So one day she brought it and had me try it on. It was a beautiful dress with a wide skirt, you know, sort of bouffant, and little tucks in the bodice part which is what, I suppose, people wore then . . . And so I . . . was able to wear it" (17--3). While hand-me-downs were certainly not the rule, it is not difficult to imagine the relationship that developed among a faculty which typically consisted of several very young women and a couple of much older women.

If there is any doubt about the teachers' use of "family" metaphors to help understand the "sister-like" and "mother-daughter-like" relationships among the faculty, the "mother-child" metaphor used to describe the teacher-student relationship is clear. Linda A. specifically says so in anecdote 7 and Susan E. seems to have used her colleagues and especially her students as a second family.

> Susan E.: I loved the people. I love kids. I've never had any children but I love kids, and I loved the people I worked with. I don't mean by that you felt equally toward all of them. But by--just generally, I like people. And I had a room down there--I made silhouettes of all the kids, and they went all the way around the room, pigtails and all (23—22).

One teacher became so involved with one little girl that she adopted the student when the girl's mother could no longer afford to care for her (2--6).

While the images of family are not universal, the close relationships which grew among the young women and the friendly but reserved relationship they had with the older women are nearly so. Certainly the mother-like tender and proud manner in which these women speak of their "kids" is not too far-fetched even today.

In spite of, or perhaps partly because of, this family image, teachers were expected to be single--either not yet married when young or a "spinster" or widow when older. Linda A.'s exclamation that "you lost everything when you got married" was echoed frequently. The loss of "everything" implies more than just income. In 1929 the Hamilton School Board adopted a policy of hiring only single women and firing all married women. This was, of course, justified on financial grounds. Why should we allow two income families when there are single women without jobs? But there is no inherent logic to the firing of married women and the maintenance of single women who live at home with their, often wealthy, fathers. In fact, those well established fathers probably required the income less than the newly-married husbands.

At least two women believed the ban interfered with their ability to find serious suitors. Alice H. explained, "This discouraged the young men. Because, like I said, it was depression years and they couldn't swing a house on their, uh, and expenses on, on their salary. So they looked for girls who were secretaries or nurses or something like that who could marry and bring in another salary. So if you were a teacher why the men--You were an untouchable" (14-30). When asked to react to the idea that the non-marrying rule put a strain on dating, Susan E. whole-heartedly agreed, "Oh, it did! It did!"

Others do not completely agree but the stories of delayed marriages are legion. Several of those women interviewed waited seven to eight years to get married until they could wait no more or until World War II and threatened legal action finally lifted the ban in the forties.

The women claim that they felt, even then, the non-marriage rule was grossly unfair, but they believed that public sentiment during the depression was against giving a job to a married women who had a husband to support her at

the same time many single women were without income. Although they complained to each other, they really did not think of trying to fight the rule. Roseanne G. explains, "In those days teachers accepted more than they would now, I think, what was decided up at the Board and by the superintendent . . ." (17--35). So the image of the single and subservient woman was strong enough to prevent any reversal of this rule.

In return for her cooperation, the teacher was given a special place in society. For some this was accepted in stride. Linda A. in anecdote 11 indicates easy acceptance of her status. Others agree.

> Elsa K.: I enjoyed my life in Hamilton. You were respected and part of the community.
>
> Interviewer: Did they treat you differently, perhaps, than they might have other young women your age?
>
> Elsa K.: I don't know. I don't think they did treat me any differently. But, I think, I mean, well, yes! I think they had respect, you know (7--11).

And Bertha C. when asked to describe teachers' status replied,

> You were not just an ordinary person, and you were--people were interested in knowing you. People were interested in talking to you . . . . I think they expected you to be an outstanding person. And I think we were selected because maybe we were (9-23).

Many others, however, found this special status burdensome rather than welcomed. Roseanne G. explains, "I mean, if I didn't know the, right off, if I couldn't tell you the capital of, uh, Rhode Island or something, it was one thing, and they'd say, 'How do you teach your children if you don't--'"(17--25). Peggy F. complains, "Well, I think we were censored. Not knowingly, I mean things we did . . . . Well, it wasn't really censored, but maybe it was ridiculed . . . . I mean we have to be careful, what you did was everybody's business in other words" (4--15) Merle J. adds, "Oh, you were expected to be above reproach in every way. <u>They</u> could do certain things or any, you know,

that a teacher couldn't do. Yes, you were supposed to--It was a terrible thing if you took a drink in those days or smoked a cigarette in those days" (2—17). Sallie D. and Susan E. were afraid to wear colored nail polish. When sued for causing an automobile accident, Susan E. settled out of court. She and her boyfriend were afraid a public court appearance would cost her her job. Teachers were respected members of society. While a few of the women thrived on their status, most felt it burdensome.

Summary. Taught since childhood that teachers must be respected they found as adults that teachers must respect their superiors. While creating an almost family-like atmosphere in school, they were prevented from establishing a family outside of school. The teacher as a concept included ideas that were often in conflict with each other and which seem to parallel the broader view of themselves as women.

Teachers View Themselves as Women

While still young girls, many women decided to teach. Linda A. had always dreamed of being a teacher. Sallie D. shared that dream. "Well, I always, I always, from the time I was small enjoyed being with children and that was, that was all I ever thought about was getting to be a teacher someday" (19—5). Peggy F. told her mother, "Oh, I want to be a teacher—I loved my teachers so much" (4—3). Many of those interviewed expressed similar sentiments. A deep-down belief, even as girls, that teaching would provide them with personal fulfillment.

Certainly this coincides with the public view of teachers--hard working, dedicated, willing to undergo any sacrifice for their students. Such teachers taught for personal fulfillment and would probably teach even if not paid. Such an image was certainly true for some of these women, but not all of them. In fact, many of them went into teaching because their parents wanted them to.

"I guess I never really decided to be a teacher," said Barbara B., "my parents decided for me" (13--11). Bertha C. wanted to go into welfare but her family talked her out of it (9—1). Many of the women taught simply because they needed a job. For women teaching was the best paying job around. Certainly the selection of occupations was limited. One teacher responded to the question of why she taught with a simple, "Because I went to college."

Susan E., one of those who taught because she wanted a job, did not like the self-sacrificing image placed on teachers and the difficulty it created. "You just didn't do it. [Demand a higher salary.] It wouldn't be professional. It wouldn't be--I hate the word—It wouldn't be dedicated. I just hate that word, because I wasn't dedicated to teaching. I just liked it" (23--27). She taught because she needed a job and this was as interesting and well-paying a job as was available.

Women were not supposed to be interested in jobs. They had learned that true fulfillment came through marriage and having children. Even some of those who never married confided that their true goal in life had been to find a husband.

> Sallie D.: My goal was always to have children of my own. Since I love children anyway, that was the most important thing in the world for me at that age. I was 17 when I started college so I was teaching at—at 19 I would have been teaching. So that's the only thing, I thought that the most important thing in life was to be married and have a family. And that was my goal. I think that was instilled in you, possibly, when you—back in those days that was--never thought about a career being the most important thing in the world to you (19—30).

This idea was not openly discussed but it was implicitly understood. Sallie D. reflects others' thoughts when she said, "I don't think—I never

discussed—a lot of those things you just sort of keep inside you and you don't verbalize all your desires and hopes for the future. But I know that--my friends that was one of their goals I think, was to find a husband, get married, have a home" (19--30-31).

Teaching was one way to bide their time until marriage and improve their skills as mothers. Perhaps the family and mother images placed on the schools made teaching a most inviting profession. Teachers were respected, in their way, but also clearly subordinate. Women had to learn how to order and organize their own world, while at the same time remaining dependent on others and ignorant of the "real" world.

All but one of those women interviewed lived with their parents the first several years of teaching. The one exception lived at the YWCA. Such a situation allowed many the luxury of not worrying about money. Their salaries were more like a large allowance. They used it to buy fur coats and go on trips, or to save for future use. These women were often quite oblivious to worldly affairs even to the effects of the depression. Linda A.'s story about the "handwriting on the wall" (anecdote 10) is a good example.

While most of the women lived a life of dependence, many others learned that others depended on them. Several were the sole support of a widowed mother or sick father. Their income was needed to hold the family together. The majority may have lived with father until they could find a husband, but a large minority shouldered the financial burden of their family until they could find a man willing to shoulder it for them. But often this latter group found few who were willing, until after they had fulfilled their family obligations. They are the ones who are most likely to have made a career in the schools.

For most women the only truly legitimate realm for them was the family. The most appropriate way to fulfill their function was to marry and have children. This could not be done, however, until all obligations to their parents were completed and a man could be found to marry them. Until then one had to have a job, and teaching was a good choice. Schools, as we have seen, were often pictured as extended families and teachers as mothers, sisters, and daughters. What a perfect way to earn money and satisfy ones learned needs as a female.

There was only one major problem with the metaphor. Mothers, sisters, and daughters are not supposed to present themselves as sexually attractive; young, single girls, even proper ones, are. The teacher-role could only satisfy a part of the female image. To complete their self-image almost all of these women engaged in an almost surreptitious private life. Susan E. said, "If you went to a dance, if you went to a party, if you did all of the things that a lot of us did, you had to do it on the Q. T. You couldn't just do it openly" (23--17). Most of them did have an active social life. It was not really secret and was certainly moral. As Peggy F. pointed out, "You never felt guilty about going out on dates or dancing. Everything was O.K., you know. It was fun. We had a wonderful time" (4--15). This was so, even if, as others told me, you had to go to a roadhouse outside of town for a drink and to Cincinnati for a dance because a dance at the local hotel could start the rumors flying!

The no-marriage rule created a whole new obstacle to many women's lives. More than one teacher dared take an out-of-town trip with their long-time fiances. A deed which even today they are afraid to make public. Several teachers were secretly married and living apart. A few remained teaching

until they became pregnant. One teacher was able to hide her pregnancy until the newspaper published her name in the "New Births" column. At that point the school authorities told her that "if she didn't announce her wedding, or marriage, she would have to adopt her own child if she had the child as [under] her maiden name" (23--30). She had to quit her job. She had been married six years.

Secret marriages were really quite common, but one wonders how secret they really were. Sallie D. discussed her secret marriage.

> Sallie D.: Other people knew about it . . . . You just didn't . . . discuss it, broadcast it, but everybody would know it, Yes.
>
> Interviewer: [Did] the principal know it?
>
> Sallie D.: No, I don't think the principal knew. Although, I'm sure he might. He had to know it eventually because I was--I became pregnant then before the year was out, and he knew it, [but] he didn't, he didn't say anything (19--11).

There was a conspiracy of silence among the teachers. They all seemed to understand the duality of their situation even if many of them despised it. Most of them portrayed the appropriate public image and violated it only very carefully or in the secret of their peers, like the woman who wore high heels to school everyday even though she changed into flats while in the classroom, or the young woman who told the Canadian borderguard that she was not a teacher but a stripper from the Gaiety Theatre.

These young women had to maintain a careful balance in their activities to satisfy their compound vision of their own female selves. Many found teaching to fulfill a deep-seated need and were truly dedicated to teaching, but just as many taught because their parents wanted them to, or there really was not anything else available to them. Harboring the desire for husband and home,

teaching became the training ground for that future life. For many the home situation, or the social situation, or even their own personality dictated that the "temporary" teaching job become a life-long career. Forbidden by their upbringing to think in terms of careers, what was originally just a "training ground," often became a substitute family.

Part IV: An Outside View

Although all the women quoted were not necessarily the best of friends, they all were accepted by the educational establishment. They were all insiders. Patricia I., however, was not. Throughout her career Patricia did not fit in. She was Jewish and divorced. Her story finds a surprising number of conceptions which do not parallel the others. As an outsider her story confirms the cultural creations of the others by its difference.

Patricia's Story. Like Linda A., Patricia I. learned to respect teachers as a child, but she also learned that there were limits to that respect.

Patricia I.:
(1) We had one [teacher] that everytime you would stand up to answer a question and you didn't know it in Spanish or Latin, she would say, 'Jew, sit down. Zero for the day.' . . . I was a senior at that time so my father was very aggressive and he went to school; instead of going to the principal he went to her directly. And he says, 'Listen here,' he says, 'I've been in this town since 1906.' . . . And he says, 'I've lived here all my life; I have paid all my taxes;
(3) I support everything that the city needs.' And he says, 'And you're not going to treat my daughter that way.' . . . He says, 'But you are going to stop picking on the Jewish children, and if you don't I am going to talk to the principal and then I am going to the superintendent.' Who are both friends of his . . . No one except my father that I know of that went to school and told the teacher off. It was not the thing one did. Just accepted it . . . . Fact, is,
(1) my father always told me, "You get in trouble in school, you're gonna get it double at home (32--13-14, 15).

After high school, Patricia I. went to Ohio State and majored in journalism.

(2) Patricia I.: I was just a playgirl . . . . I just went there to have a good time. In those days girls weren't expected to amount to anything, they were supposed to get married and have a family. So I went a year and a quarter, found a guy, married him. Married six years and that was the end of that. And I thought I was getting nowhere in life so I decided to go back to college . . . . And I had a critic, you know, when you did you practice teaching, and she was the nosiest thing that ever lived. And somebody had told her that I was divorced, and she questioned me about it and I says, "It is none of your business what I had happen to me in my private life. I am here for one purpose only. It is to prepare myself to make a living" (32--9).

(4) Only an average student in school, Patricia I. found her first day of teaching "scary" but, "by the time you took attendance and got all their records that day was gone" (32—17).

Like the other teachers, she lived with her parents, but unlike the others Patricia found living at home was a disadvantage.

(8) Patricia I.: I should never have been in a school where I was known because they [the students] were all in my neighborhood.

Interviewer: You think that causes problems?

Patricia I.: Oh, definitely. Especially when you know all their parents and . . .

Interviewer: Why isn't it an advantage?

Patricia I.: It isn't, it's better to be a stranger--then they don't, then they don't know what you are or what you can do . . . . After all, out of school I was Patricia and in school I was Miss I. (32--16).

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In trying to learn how to teach, Patricia asked other teachers for help.

(7) "And those that were my friends," she says, "would tell me, and those who weren't my friends would tell <u>on</u> me" (32--11).

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Interviewer: You mean teachers really just didn't sit down and talk?

(7) Patricia I.: No, no, God forbid. You couldn't complain about anything. . . . You'd get fired.

• • •

(7) Patricia I.: I had a hard [time] breaking down the people to accept me, the teachers. Which they finally did.

Interviewer: Because of the divorce?

Patricia I.: I think that and my religion.

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After suspecting one student of stealing money from the school, Patricia (5) "went to the principal and I asked him what to do about it and he says I don't know what you can do. He wouldn't give me any assistance or anything. So I went to the boy's home and told his mother. . . . They found the money under the bed" (32—3).

• • •

Patricia tried to sue the school system so that she could get married, (11) but her lawyer pointed out that she would have to marry first and get fired before she could sue. As a result, she and a small group of friends talked one of the former teachers into bringing suit and helped her out by paying for the legal fees. Their action forced the school system to eliminate the no-marriage rule.

Analysis. When compared to Linda A. and the others, Patricia I. based her world on differing conceptions of teachers and women. Teachers were to be respected but not blindly. At no time in her narrative do we find any allusion to a mother-like role, nor do we find a warm, comrade-like atmosphere in the school. There is nothing which suggests "family" images. Patricia clearly sees this as a job and any familiarity actually inhibited her.

As a woman Patricia was able to establish her independence through her divorce. She also showed that her subordinate position did not require submissiveness. Finally, when faced with the obvious violation of her rights, she felt no qualms about bringing in the law.

That Patricia I. provides a very different picture of teachers and women does not invalidate the images portrayed in this paper. Patricia I. was an outsider. Her difference is the exception which proves the rule.

Concluding Thoughts

To what extent is this image of teacher and woman really true? We could point to many facts to show that many of these images are, in fact, not true. The respected image of teachers, for example, is not found among poor sections of town where the many Appalachian migrants lived. Also, the teachers were hand-picked, to be sure, but whether they were the outstanding young women of the community could be argued with. Although a few had grown up in the upper or upper-middle classes, the majority appear to come from the lower-middle or upper-lower classes. We might argue that rather than the "public mothers" of the community their role is closer to that of the "gatekeeper" to the middle class. But what is important here is that the women themselves believed teachers were respected and thought about teachers in terms which more closely resemble mothers than gatekeepers. Ethnohistory is interested in describing with accuracy participants' own conceptions. This study does not establish to what extent this image is really true. Instead it presents an image which represents the world of the 1930s as constructed by the young women teachers of Hamilton.

Footnotes

1. Numbers refer to the manuscript and the page numbers from "Education in the Thirties—An Oral History." This collection is in the process of being transcribed. The collection should be available from King Library, Miami University, later this year.

The numbers in the margin are anecdote markers. They refer to a type of anecdote rather than a particular anecdote.
All names have been changed.

2. James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972), p. 8.

3. Spradley and McCurdy, The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society.